

## Absent on the Job?

### *Work and Elder Family Care*



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program  
Completing the Care

### Did you know?

- Approximately **35 percent** of workers report that they have provided care for a family member over the age of 65 in the last year (Bond, *et al.*, 2002)
- Eldercare is *not* simply a “women’s issue” -- almost half of working family caregivers are men (Bond, *et al.*, 1998)
- The effect on the workplace is increasing as the number of caregivers is expected to grow 15-20% per year due to the aging baby boomers and increasing life expectancy – not only are more older adults living longer with chronic illness, but employees will have more older relatives that need care at one time (Health Canada Research, 2004)
- A recent survey of 3000 North Carolinians looking at known behavioral risk factors for health revealed that 25% of North Carolinians are currently caring for a family member or friend over the age of 60; of these, 43% were caring for a person with Alzheimer’s disease or other related dementia (DAAS, 2003)
- Half of adults caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease are working full-time (National Alliance for Caregiving, 2004)
- Over 50% of adults caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease spend an average of 46 hours per week providing care, and over 50% feel as if they are “on call” 24 hours a day (Schulz, 2003)
  - ⇒ Employed caregivers often juggle the demands of two full-time jobs with only one paycheck

## The Bottom-Line for Business

***“Employers, whether they believe it or not – are paying for elder care.”***

**– SHRM Report on *The Aging Workforce***

- Alzheimer’s disease alone costs American businesses **over \$61 billion** per year: \$24.6 billion is due to health care costs, and \$36.5 billion is due to replacement costs, employee absenteeism, and loss of employee productivity (Koppel, 2004)
- A recent national survey of caregiver employees (AARP 2004) revealed that 90% of these caregivers have experienced at least one workplace effect due to caregiving, including:
  - Arriving late, leaving early, or taking time off (57%)
  - Taking a leave of absence (17%)
  - Reducing work hours (10%)
  - Giving up work entirely (6%)
  - Losing benefits (5%)
  - Turning down promotion (4%)
  - Retiring early (3%)
- Research investigating the work-related outcomes of caregiver stress revealed that 56% of respondents reported they were less productive at work (Scharlach, 2004)
- Employees who continue working are often distracted, anxious, and less efficient due to worry about their family member or about the toll on their own health associated with caregiving
- One-quarter of respondents in a national survey reported that the health-effects related to caregiving were negatively affecting their work performance (MetLife 1999)



## What are the problems?

- Research documents that the distress and physical demands of caregiving are associated with an increased risk of physical and psychiatric illness (Schulz, 2004)

- Depression and anxiety are more prevalent among caregivers than non-caregivers – 43% of caregivers are clinically depressed
- Caregivers are less likely than non-caregivers to practice preventive health behaviors, and their immune systems are often compromised
- Poorer cardiovascular health and slower wound healing have also been observed in caregivers when compared to non-caregivers
- Use of prescription drugs is 2-3 times higher for employed caregivers than non-caregivers (CMS)
- Caregivers who experience conflict between work and caregiving report more overload, worry, and strain (Edwards, *et al.*, 2002)

## What are possible solutions?

***One in four employers with more than 100 employees has a program for employee caregivers***

***- Family Caregiver Alliance***

- *Save your employees' time – point them to the following websites:* [www.fullcirclecare.org](http://www.fullcirclecare.org), [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org), [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org), [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org), [www.benefitscheckup.org](http://www.benefitscheckup.org), [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov), [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)
- *Call your Area Agency on Aging family caregiver specialist*
- *Display and distribute resource information from the Area Agency on Aging or the local aging office.*

- *Be creative!*
  - A bank offered an after-hours weekly support program for employee support, concrete information on how to navigate the service system, and the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences. Employees reported feeling better prepared to meet work demands. They were more productive, and felt less compelled to call in sick to meet their care responsibilities. Employees also reported feeling a commitment to their institution because their employer was committed to their well-being.
- *Offer lunchtime seminars for employees*
  - Topics could include Medicare/Medicaid, Alzheimer's disease, home help, and self-care for family caregivers. Speakers for these topics are often free. Your local family caregiver specialist can help arrange these seminars.
  - The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, SAS Institute, IBM are a few of the organizations that arrange lunch and learn sessions for employees on various eldercare topics.
- *Sponsor a Grief Awareness Day to acknowledge grief and loss in the workplace.*  
*Bring a speaker in to talk about the various types of loss and expression of grief. Let staff know it is OK and normal to experience ups and down in the face of loss.*
- *Supervisor training*  
 Your local family caregiver specialist can assist in training supervisors to be alert to eldercare issues in the workplace and to help identify ways to address them.
- *Flexible work options*
  - Compressed work weeks, flextime, job-sharing, work-at-home options, leave with/without pay options (for more information, visit [www.hr.duke.edu/flexwork](http://www.hr.duke.edu/flexwork))
- *Information and assistance, case management and counseling*
  - Your family caregiver specialist or local information and referral specialist can find the right service for your employees who may need additional help with eldercare. Supportive services have proven to reduce depression in caregivers (Mittelman, *et al.*, 2004)

## The Benefits

- Employees with supportive workplaces have more job satisfaction and greater loyalty and commitment to the organization's success (Galinsky and Bond, 1998)
- Support for employee family caregivers can result in improved physical and psychological health, fewer sick days and lower replacement costs
- Acknowledging, respecting, and supporting caregivers in the workplace:
  - makes it easier to attract and retain good employees
  - Increases productivity and community image is enhanced
  - Helps your company becomes a community and workplace leader

## North Carolina Success Stories

- A small social agency in rural eastern North Carolina gave its employees an hour per month to attend a community-based caregiver support group
- A North Carolina teacher benefited from free, confidential elder care consulting provided by her employer in the Piedmont area
- A working caregiver in southwestern North Carolina learned self-care tips in a free Powerful Tools for Caregiving class led by experienced AARP volunteers and Cooperative Extension staff